

Protecting Our Community Character
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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One of the ways San Diego empowers its residents and gives them a voice in civic matters is through community planning groups such as the Rancho Peñasquitos Planning Board. The dedicated volunteers who serve on these boards donate countless hours of their time to protect the character and feel of our neighborhoods and to provide input and advice to the City Council on an array of land use matters. They deserve our thanks for their tireless work.

Recently, the City Council validated the work of the PQ Planning Board by upholding the decision not to allow a residential lot split on Marianopolis Way. The Council agreed with the Planning Board that building two homes where only one was planned for was not in the best interest of the surrounding community. There were also serious geological concerns associated with this project.

While planning boards are often decried for being “NIMBY’s,” this was a case where the board was truly protecting the quality and character of their community. Building on a potentially unstable slope could be problematic for the neighborhood.

This situation is a great example of the good things that can happen when residents in an affected area work with the local Planning Board. My thanks go out to all of you for your continued efforts to protect and enhance this great community.

I was surprised by a recent court ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Rudi Brewster which raised a number of questions about the City’s habitat conservation plan. The Multiple Species Conservation Plan (“MSCP”) was created by the City in the late 1990’s to balance the need for environmental protection with the region’s growing need for housing.

The MSCP allows the City to protect endangered plants and animals by concentrating residential and commercial development away from open space. Habitat plans like ours are embraced by local governments, businesses and environmentalists, and our success has been replicated across the country. Since authorized by Congress in the early 1980’s, more than 675 habitat conservation plans have been established in the United States.

Here in San Diego, there are a number of tangible examples of the success of the MSCP. The 1,200-acre Black Mountain Open Space Park is one of the few remaining coastal highlands untouched by development. The City of San Diego worked closely with the Black Mountain Ranch corporation to acquire and improve the land, and connect the park to the San Dieguito River Park, west to Pacific Highlands Ranch Open Space and southwest to the Del Mar Mesa Open Space and Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve.

Citywide, the land conservation element of the MSCP has been extremely successful, with over 90% of target areas acquired and protected by the City.

Judge Brewster's ruling could delay numerous development projects across the city, including the completion of a section of Camino del Sur linking Park Village Road and Carmel Mountain Road. This project is a vital link for public safety and traffic flow.

I strongly believe that habitat plans such as the MSCP are a smart, balanced approach to preserving open space while creating vibrant and safe communities for our children to live. I will do all I can to preserve the MSCP and complete the Camino del Sur project.